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ABSTRACT

The Worker Education Program (WEP) of Northeastern Illinois University (NIU) is a partnership among NIU; the Union of Needle Trades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE); and companies whose employees are represented by UNITE. Now in its fourth year, the WEP operates in 13 diverse types of workplaces in three states: Illinois, Ohio, and Kentucky. Through the WEP, more than 2,000 workers have attended classes in English as a second language, reading and writing, math, general educational development, basic communications for the workplace, and problem-solving skills. The WEP's partnering model is based on the following: workplace advisory boards; face-to-face recruitment and stipends to help workers overcome common barriers to program participation (such as child care and transportation problems); worker ownership of the program; worker recognition ceremonies; strong employer investment; the principle that curriculum development is an inventive process that includes task analysis and learner-centered methodologies; and ongoing professional development. Thanks to the WEP, participating workers have achieved measurable increases in their basic and problem-solving skills and participating businesses have reaped the following benefits: less absenteeism, better safety records, greater productivity, improved team building, less waste, and a more stable work force. (Contains 20 references.) (MN)

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Partners in Progress

a monograph on the Worker Education Program of Eastern Illinois University

Florence S. Estes, EdD

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Partners in Progress

a monograph on the Worker Education Program of Northeastern Illinois University

Florence S. Estes, PhD

The Worker Education Program is a partnership between Northeastern Illinois University and the Central States Joint Board of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) coordinated through the College of Education's Chicago Teachers' Center.

April 1997

A Word About the Partners

Northeastern Illinois University
College of Education
Chicago Teachers' Center

Northeastern Illinois University College of Education's Chicago Teachers' Center is part of a public urban university which serves an economically and ethnically diverse population. As one of the largest Colleges of Education in the greater Chicago metropolitan area, it offers a comprehensive range of programs at the undergraduate and graduate level as well as extensive educational outreach services.

Dating back nearly 130 years, the College has a long history of dedication to excellence and innovation in education. This dedication has given rise to the College's mission of building communities of lifelong learners through collaboration. The mission encompasses three goals – training outstanding teachers, developing innovative research, and delivering extended service to schools, communities, business, industry, and professional groups.

As an integral part of its commitment to these goals, the College of Education has established the Chicago Teachers' Center. Since 1978 the Center has been working closely with elementary and secondary teachers as well as students and faculty from the College of Education to address the needs of urban teachers, students and parents, while implementing the latest in educational theory and practice. The Center also collaborates with several community and business organizations such as the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, to extend the learning process beyond the confines of the traditional classroom environment.

Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees

The Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) was founded in 1914 in Chicago, Illinois. At that time, the membership consisted primarily of immigrant, male, skilled tailors from Eastern Europe. From its beginning, the union helped its membership learn English and helped immigrant families settle into the American workplace and communities. Over the years, the membership became more female and mirrored the waves of immigration into the United States, but education for union members remained a priority with UNITE. For the past twenty years, the union has had a growing membership of immigrants from Latin America and Asia.

Today, the Chicago and Central States Joint Board of UNITE represents American and immigrant workers in a variety of industries. The increase in global competition along with rapid technological changes have created a climate in which the union and its business partners have begun to increase educational efforts. The ultimate goal is to keep jobs in this country and to prepare American workers to work competitively with workers from all parts of the world.

The Author

Florence Estes holds a Doctoral degree in Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation from the University of Kentucky and a Masters degree in Labor Studies from the University of Massachusetts. Dr. Estes has worked as a freelance writer and a grant writer. She has published articles in many professional journals on labor, environmental, and education issues. She was a visiting lecturer at Northeastern Illinois University. In this capacity she began to collaborate with the Worker Education Program.

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PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

In 1910, eight young women seamstresses at Hart, Schaeffner and Marx in Chicago walked off the job protesting low pay and poor working conditions. Within months, 40,000 clothing workers from sweatshops all over the city's garment district were marching with them. Most of these workers were skilled male tailors, all of them new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Organizing meetings were held. Dreams of a better life joined concrete plans of action and by 1914, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America was born and their first contract was signed. It had been a hard road! The adversarial climate made for rough negotiations and hard won victories for thousands of workers speaking seven different languages. And through it all, these workers—holding meetings, rallies and picket signs—spent many patient hours listening to and translating for each other in order to arrive at a common language of hope. To bring the community closer together, the union formed a partnership to teach English and citizenship with Hull House, the settlement community established in the garment district by Jane Addams.

Libby Saries, Director of Education and Political Action for the Chicago and Central States Joint Board of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) since the mid 1970's is heir to that tradition. "Constantly since that time, our union has placed a strong emphasis on education and training of workers," she says.

While the educational tradition remains solid, the union has faced massive changes in the workplace. Increased automation has de-skilled the workforce in the garment industry. Much of the industry has moved overseas. It changed again in the summer of 1995 when the Amalgamated merged with the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union to form UNITE and expanded its membership to workers outside the garment industry. It continues to be a union of immigrants, but in the 1990's they are mostly from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Central and South America, and the Pacific Rim.

Another important change is that many employers and unions are cautiously and sometimes awkwardly attempting to soften more adversarial relations of the past. Unions are interested in working collaboratively with employers who wish to keep their operations in the United States profitable so that the jobs remain here. One point of agreement between unions and employers is that education and training in basic skills is essential to keep workplaces competitive in the increasingly globalizing economy.

Saries and leaders from other unions in the Chicago area formed the union-based education program called the Workers' Consortium in the late 1980's, a precursor to the Worker Education Program now in place. Its purpose was to provide English as a Second Language, basic skills and high school diploma equivalency training for union members. Classes were held at the UNITE union hall. A very small grant from the Illinois Secretary of State (SOS) provided funding.

"We struggled from the beginning with how to do it, how to finance it, and how to motivate our members to come to class," said Saries. She explained that many union members live in the city and commute to the suburbs, leaving in early morning car pools. "Many of them are women who get up at 4:30 or 5:00 o'clock in

the morning. They come home at night, take care of kids and cook dinner, and frankly," said Saries, " asking them to come on their own time to the union hall at 7:00 or 7:30 at night is unrealistic." Teachers were provided through contracts with the local community colleges and the union had little control over the content of the curriculum. Then, in June of 1990, before the problems could be addressed, Saries was notified that SOS funding priorities were changing and support for this program would not be renewed in 1991.

"Two weeks later somebody brought to my attention a notice in the Federal Register about literacy grants. When I read the announcement, I saw that proposal was due in two weeks," Saries said. The grants that would be awarded by the U.S. Department of Education stipulated that workplace literacy programs were to be administered through partnerships between unions, universities, workers and industry. The classes themselves would be held at the workplaces, eliminating problems with motivation inherent in offsite training.

Saries contacted Jerry Olson, Ph.D., Associate Dean of Northeastern Illinois University's College of Education and Director of the Chicago Teachers' Center. The mission of the Chicago Teachers' Center (CTC) is to collaborate with community organizations to extend the learning process beyond the confines of the traditional classroom environment. Olson was excited about the possibilities and immediately assembled his grant-writing staff to go to work with Saries. "This was an opportunity for the university to become involved with educating some of the parents of students in the schools where we were working to bring about change," said Olson. " We are always seeking opportunities to learn more about the issues that parents face in their own growth and development and how they impact the children we serve."

The group worked expertly and diligently so that just in time for the deadline, Saries recalls, "we had a two inch thick grant application ready to go. The staff at CTC was

wonderful and worked really hard." A first step toward partnership had begun.

It took a while, but the following April, word came that the Chicago Teachers' Center, in conjunction with the union and the employers where the union's workers were represented would be funded to start a substantive worker education program.

"There was adequate funding to start a program," Saries said, "but it was only the beginning of what continues to be a challenging and rewarding experiment in forging partnerships where none before have existed."

From the point of view of the cooperating employers, the emerging educational partnership has improved the bottom line. Conrad Medina, plant manager of Juno Lighting Inc., a manufacturer of track lighting and a participant in the program, says the program has improved the employer's competitive position. He has attributed this to English as a Second Language and communication skills classes.

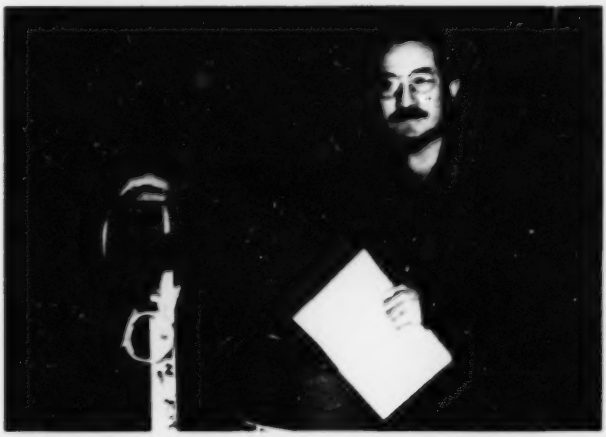
"The program, because of the improved communication has [helped us] meet certain international standards. And therefore the products can be marketed not only in the United States but in other countries. With the improved communication, all the people working together from the supervisors to the group leaders to the workers understand what is required. Without understanding that, because of poor communication, it makes it harder to implement all of these efficiencies," says Medina.

In the words of Bob Staes, Safety Manager at Juno Lighting, Inc., "the education and training of workers ought to be seen as a long term investment worth the eventual returns." He describes basic skills education as "a growing process in that you don't see results from the beginning classes, but as people feel more comfortable with the language, English in this case, they grow in the job." At Juno, this has meant substantial reduction of turnover, enabling the employer to promote from within. As for the partnership, Staes believes that "empowering people to

resolve issues is important. Management dictating solutions doesn't necessarily dictate the correct solutions. The people who work in their jobs day in and day out have a better understanding of what the problems are than the people who sit in the ivory towers."

Now in its fourth year, the Worker Education Program (WEP) operates in 13 workplaces in three states: Illinois, Ohio and Kentucky. More than 2,000 workers have attended classes in English as a Second Language (ESL), Reading and Writing, Math, GED, Basic Communications for the Workplace, and Problem-Solving Skills. Quantitative measures show that learners attained higher levels of reading, writing, math and problem-solving skills as the result of taking these classes. Likewise, workplaces have experienced less absenteeism, better safety records, greater productivity, improved team-building, less waste and a more stable workforce. Workers' new skills translate into more effective communications with coworkers and supervisors; more promotions; and attainment of a better understanding of the union contract. (Boyter-Escalona, *Enhancing Workers' Skills)*

While skill-building is work-focused, the classes have a "ripple-effect" on workers' personal and parenting lives, as well. They are better able to understand loan applications, how to vote, and how to ask questions of a physi-



cian. In short, they are empowered to take greater control of their lives. As adult workers who are learning basic skills and problem solving in their work environments, they are better able to understand their childrens' school experiences and can better serve their communities by becoming more involved in their local schools.

What kind of questions have been raised after three years of a university-union-employer-worker partnership in providing quality education to workers?

There are many.

First, how do unions and employers, steeped in the historical discourse of conflict, find a new language to use to talk about what they have in common, the desire for an educated workforce?

Second, what measures can be taken to recruit workers into the classes? Non-literate workers have often spent a lifetime concealing their inability to read or write, either in English or another language. How can worker education administrators assure workers that tests used to measure abilities won't be shared with employers so that skill levels will remain confidential? How can workers find the confidence to attend their first class? What will motivate them to stay?

Third, how can curricula be designed which relate to worker experience and to adult ways of learning? And how does a program go about training teachers to be comfortable in the often chaotic setting of a factory, and to teach in ways which build trust, openness and a commitment to lifelong learning?

The Worker Education Program administrators claim no easy answers and no absolute principles. However, the hope is that this monograph will be a way of sharing experiences and insights with readers. This monograph was produced with three groups in mind. The first are the unions or employers who may be thinking of starting worker education programs. The second are public school administrators who may want to find ways to attract adults to

English language classes. The last are university educators who want to find ways to reach out to their nontraditional communities.

STRUCTURE, SCOPE, AND RECOGNITION

The Worker Education Program operates in 13 manufacturing plants which make products as varied as shirts, track lighting, crepe paper, men's wear, plastic lawn products; and also in a bank, an insurance office and a community clinic. Workers and their union representatives join their employers and WEP administrators to make decisions about workplace programs. The program is dynamic, operating in a continuous flow of planning, recruitment, curriculum development, professional development and program evaluation. All partners collaborate in program design, evaluation, scheduling and recruitment through advisory boards. These boards, comprised of workers, union representatives and plant managers, evaluate and develop the educational programs held in their workplaces, on employer time.

Classes are held in cycles which typically run for 16 weeks. Students are recruited for classes from within the plant by management, the union, and the educational provider through flyers, open houses and by word of mouth among workers. Program coordinators develop curriculum tools which are based on task analysis of jobs specific to the individual workplaces. Furthermore, teachers strive for learner-centered classrooms, where the voices of students help to generate themes to be turned into relevant lessons. Methodologies consistent with learner-centered approaches to teaching are used in order to address the divergent learning styles and experiences of individual students. Teaching is enhanced by the professional development component of the program which provides teachers with ongoing feedback, training and opportunities for problem solving in regular teacher meetings.

The day-to-day administration of the program is the responsibility of Program Director, Margaret Boyter-Escalona, and three program coordinators. Twelve educators teach classes in Chicago area workplaces. Since the program expanded to plants in Cleveland, Cincinnati and Louisville, several additional educational providers

have entered into a contractual relationship with the worker education program.

The success of the CTC's Worker Education Program has been noticed nationally by educators, journalists and workplace consultants. Dr. Joseph J. Penbera, Eaton Fellow of Economics and Chairman of the Pennant Group, at a recent national conference, cited the program as a promising model for helping to develop a creative and educated workforce for the 21st century. (Penbera, 15) *Chicago Tribune*'s syndicated columnist Carol Kleinman's feature story on the program reached readers in places as divergent as San Antonio; Honolulu; San Francisco; Boulder; Bradenton, Florida; and Greenville, South Carolina. The Louisville *Courier-Journal* ran a story on the program at the participating Enro employer in 1995; and a national audience was reached in 1993 when the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) broadcast a story on the *America: Close Up* program of the *Nightly News*. In addition, articles have appeared nationally and locally in the labor press and in corporate publications, reflecting the co-ownership of the program by both union and employers.

This attention demonstrates a wide-ranging interest in the future of America's workforce as we approach the new millennium. Stories of successful institutional partnerships are encouraging to workers who are fearful of

losing their jobs as we move toward a more globally structured economy. And building new relationships between adult worker education and the schooling of our nation's children can be an important factor in preparing the workforce for the future. "But, companies cannot do it alone," says Boyter-Escalona. "They need to look to educators like us, and programs like Northeastern Illinois University's Worker Education Program, to tap into our expertise so that we can work together for the good of the workers, the union, and the companies." (interview)

PROMISING PRACTICES: A PARTNERING MODEL

Collaboration is a valued method of decision-making in both schools and industry. However, as institutions experiment with this model, it has become clear that collaboration is often more complex and challenging in everyday practice than it might appear at first glance. Partners with different interests and needs often have difficulty working through their differences to find common ground. And, while more authoritarian models in the workplace and in the classroom seem outmoded and faulty, people are often threatened by the change in attitudes required of collaborative decision-making. Worker Education Program partners work through these issues daily as they turn collaborative theory into practice.

Though solutions must be fluid, given the dynamic nature of the program and the complexities of collaboration, several effective strategies have emerged: the creation of **workplace advisory boards**; methods of class **recruitment**; the **curriculum as inventive process** (including task analysis, curriculum development and learner-centered methodologies); and the **professional development component** of the program.

By sharing this information, the Worker Education Program hopes to provide useful insights for programs with similar aims. Local school committees desiring to enhance adult education activities so that parents are more involved in school management may also benefit from the lessons learned in developing the Worker Education Program. Through experience, WEP has found ways to meet the challenges of recruitment and the implementation of an adult-centered learning program. Local school councils may find it useful to borrow some of these promising practices, adapting them to their own unique situations.

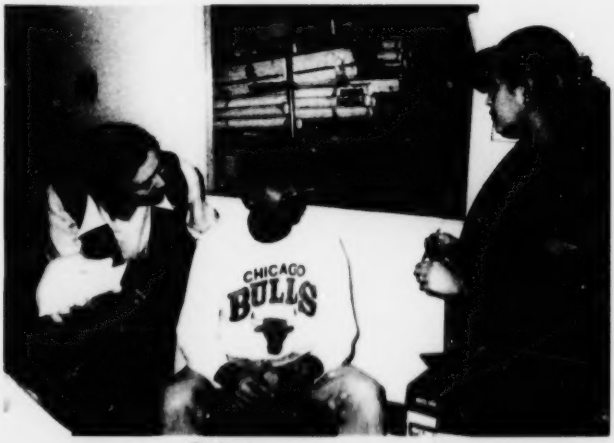
Workplace Advisory Boards

Administrators of the Worker Education Program embraced the principle of co-ownership from the time of its inception. The model called for advisory boards — made up of educators, workers, union and employer representatives — to oversee the creation and implementation of

the program and develop a sense of partnership. But, models showing how a union-employer-educator partnership could take place were simply nonexistent. The idea was new. It included players unaccustomed to collaborative decision-making. Employer, worker and university cultures were thought to be distinct and developing the right vehicle for bringing them together would take time. Ultimately, finding a structure compatible with the goal of partnership would require experimentation.

Initially the WEP administrative plan called for program-wide advisory councils among Chicago-area participants. An employer advisory council (encompassing *all* plants among Chicago area participants) and a worker advisory council (including worker representatives from *all* participating plants) functioned separately to steer the program in its inaugural steps.

Employer and worker advisory councils each met separately every other month at UNITE's offices in downtown Chicago. The separation was thought to be necessary, in part, because employer representatives spoke English almost exclusively and workers were often non-English speaking. The separation was also thought necessary because of the likelihood that workers would feel ill-at-ease voicing their concerns publicly to their supervisors. Program Director, Margaret Boyter-Escalona shares this



account of the evolution of thinking about this program-wide advisory council model:

> From the beginning the idea was that each group would give us —the educational providers—ideas on what they wanted in the program. We wanted them to feel like stakeholders in the program. The structure was a good idea but in practice there were several problems. Workers would come to meetings at the union hall on Saturdays which was very difficult for them. When they did meet, because they were from different plants, they didn't know each other. Workers at Juno Lighting, Inc., for example, really had very little in common with workers from other plants. It was difficult for employers too. They were all from different plants and had different needs and perceptions. Attendance was not good. Travel and bad weather complicated things. Eventually we decided on a workplace-specific advisory board model. (Boyter-Escalona, interviewed 12/22/95)

During the third grant period, the program-wide advisory councils were replaced by workplace-specific advisory boards. Each month, these new boards met at the various workplaces, providing an opportunity for the partners in each workplace to plan programs, work out scheduling problems, discuss recruitment strategies and evaluate coursework. "These workplace-based advisory boards have better achieved the goal of co-ownership," Boyter-Escalona states. "Now we're getting more feedback and have a lot more input on the curriculum from all the groups. There is definitely a feeling of more ownership by all parties." (12/22/95 interview)

It has become evident through the program implementation process that the most effective local advisory boards are ones in which all partners meet regularly, where there is strong leadership from the Union, and active representation and participation by management and student workers. It has been a challenge for the WEP to organize advisory boards in which these critical elements coalesce. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the different

parties are beginning to experience the benefits of partnership in the establishment of education programs. Union representative Joe Buonadonna represents workers at Enro Shirt Company in Louisville, Kentucky where the Worker Education Program has been in operation for two years. He credits the workplace advisory boards with building a reservoir of good will between the employer and the union:

> It has given us a chance to work together on something positive. The union can do something besides file grievances and the employer has a chance to do something that really benefits the worker. We're building a more positive relationship and showing we can get things done together.
> (Buonadonna, 12/28/95 telephone interview)

Meeting by meeting, advisory board representatives are learning what it means to work together. Education programs are offering opportunities for all parties to find common ground.

Recruitment

One might assume that offering basic skills training in the workplace would have a strong appeal in its own right. But in spite of the obvious benefits of increasing their basic skills, workers must overcome a number of barriers before class attendance becomes worth the investment of time and energy. Transportation problems, the difficulty of child care arrangements, competing family demands and low self-esteem have all been impediments to worker attendance. As one worker has written, deciding to take classes is not a commitment to be taken lightly:

> I like to learn English. It helps me to talk to other people. It also helps me to know my friends better. I can learn some new things. On the other hand, I can't go shopping on Saturday. I can't do my laundry and clean the house on Saturday.
> Yeung Nung Mark
> Working Hands and Active Minds, 36

While most workers attend workplace classes, Yeung

Nung Mark attends one of the Saturday classes held at the union hall in Chicago. Still, the sentiment is one which applies to most students in the Worker Education Program. They work long hours, they have family responsibilities and it is hard to find room for studying in their already demanding schedules.

According to the *WEP 1993-1995 Evaluation Report*, workers entering the program range in age from 18-76 and have achieved an average of 7 years of schooling. (Fischer and Larson, 14). For many workers in the program, attending classes and progressing academically are new experiences. For some, taking classes is daunting. As one wrote: "This class is a challenge. It makes me think, after having been out of school for thirty one years." (*Working Hands and Active Minds*, 48). This worker was able to overcome his fears born of many years away from formal schooling. Other workers have had to overcome unpleasant school memories as well. As Jonathan Kozol has written, for non-literate adults, schools often "remain the scene of former failure." (Kozol, 119)

Limited English proficiency is another significant barrier for the 62.8% of worker participants who are Spanish-speaking and the 12.6% from Asians cultures. (Fischer and Larson, 4) In some cases, these workers have attempted to learn English several times before, but were

not successful. Classes were often reported as being too large, too impersonal, and not relevant to their own lives.

WEP advisory boards are designing recruitment approaches appropriate to their workplaces. Employers, workers and educators are working together to maximize class participation through: addressing child care and transportation barriers; implementing face-to-face recruitment designs; promoting worker ownership through the *Worker Anthology* and recognition ceremonies; and supporting the companies' investments in terms of management commitment and, in many cases, compensation for class participation.

For workers who attend classes in their workplaces, stipends for **child care** are provided. For workers attending classes at the union hall, the program provides child care. In addition, stipends help offset the extra **transportation** costs some workers assume when, because their classes meet before or after work, they cannot ride with their carpools. Boyter-Escalona explains, **face-to-face recruitment** has helped the program overcome the obstacle of mistrust among potential students.

> Originally we would send flyers with the workers' paychecks. We relied mostly on paper communications. But now we realize that a lot of people don't, or can't, read mail or bulletin boards. Ultimately we realized that open houses—where food is served at prearranged locations and times in the workplaces to advertise the classes—are really successful. Conviviality is so important. When the workers get to know you [the teachers and administrators in the program] they know they can trust you. Of course we still do flyers, but the important thing is face to face contact. Now, when we have a good class, people will tell one another. This is the best form of promotion, because unless workers are convinced themselves that they are really learning something, all the food and financial incentives in the world won't motivate them to attend classes.
> (12/22/95 interview)

Creating a sense of **worker ownership** of the program is another successful recruitment tool. This is accomplished, in part, through the publication of an annual anthology which includes stories and autobiographical essays written by workers. Copies are distributed to workers and circulated around their workplaces and homes. Their writings for classes are there on the page, in black and white, to be seen by family, friends and coworkers. The accompanying sense of pride and success is contagious, sparking a new interest among coworkers in attending classes. As Boyter-Escalona has observed, "When coworkers see that their peers have written something that has been published in an anthology then they believe they can learn too." (12/22/95 interview)

Worker recognition ceremonies have also proven to be successful settings for recruitment efforts. Often held after each cycle of classes, they are informal occasions accompanied by food and music, where feelings of community are encouraged among participants.

Employer investment is also an important to recruitment and retention. When the program began, an employers' participation was often limited to providing a space for classes to be held, and helping to post flyers. Sometimes they gave WEP teachers *carte blanche* to run their programs in the plants but took no active interest beyond that. This was not a successful model. The program's research has shown that in workplaces where management representatives are actively engaged on the advisory boards, and workers participation in WEP is supported financially, class enrollment is higher and attendance is more regular. Although financial incentives vary, many of the employers pay full or half-time wages for class attendance. This works not only as an incentive for workers, but gives employers a greater stake in the success of the program. As in other aspects of the program, "the greater the stakes for each partner, the greater their commitment to the program" has become a principle of success. Both the union and the employers agree that

each party must give a little to take a little. In one successful model, employers offer monetary incentives and workers contribute half the "learning labor" in class. This is the case at Enro Shirt Company in Louisville, Kentucky.

> There were barriers to attendance, and the offering of employer time for half the class was the best thing. On the steering committee [advisory board], we wanted to be fair to the employer and fair to the workers. We also had to show a commitment from the worker to contribute their half.
> (interview with Joe Buonadonna, Enro's union representative)

Interwoven throughout WEP's recruitment efforts is the human thread. While flyers and posters are important in announcing classes and helping people to remember, they are only scraps of the larger fabric of social engagement, word-of-mouth, a sense of pride in workers' achievements, and evidence of co-ownership among all participants. Successful recruitment practices involve all of these facets.

Curriculum as an Inventive Process

> Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world and with each other.
> Paulo Freire
> *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 58

The process of curriculum development in the Worker Education Program is based on Paulo Freire's work. According to Freire, teachers must investigate their students' "thematic universe" in order to turn the raw material of experience into lesson plans. Teachers in the Worker Education Program try to form what Freire calls a "dialogic" relationship with their students. In this relationship, the concrete experiences of the workers, coupled with the insights of teachers and the imperatives of the workplace help to generate the themes of the curriculum. While this process is ongoing and dynamic, there is an explicit structure through which teachers seek a relevant and responsive curriculum within the terms of workplace education. The interrelated components of this structure include: **task analysis, curriculum development,** and **learner-centered methodology.** Each of these components provides a model in its own right for creating and teaching a flexible curriculum for working adults.

Task Analysis and Curriculum Development

Paging through the Worker Education Program's *General Workplace Curriculum Guide: English as a Second Language for the Workplace*, it is evident that the material has been developed out of concrete working experience. The guide lists universal goals both for language learning and for learning workplace communication skills, but it also provides industrial vocabularies and information on work processes which are unique to each working environment. For example, a vocabulary list used for workers at Enro Shirt Company includes words such as "Gerber cutter", "foot pressure", "feed dog" and "label." The vocabulary list for another employer includes words like "flanges", "hose reel", "table tops", and "folding chair." Specific goals for each plant also include the acquisition of language skills such as "naming and demonstrating Quality Control checks," or "reporting a problem to the group leader." In nonindustrial settings which include an insurance office, a bank and a community health clinic,

program coordinators identify forms of written and oral communication skills, and human relations skills necessary for each job.

In order to create such curricula, program coordinators analyze tasks by immersing themselves in a workplace — watching work processes, shadowing workers, talking with workers and supervisors. According to Paula Garcia, "Because we have to teach all of these jobs, we have to learn the jobs ourselves. It's almost like constant on-the-job training." (12/1/95 interview). This form of task analysis differs from more traditional forms in that it is people-centered, rather than centering exclusively on the industrial processes, and attempts to reflect how work is actually experienced.

While task analysis guides the development of curricula in terms of industrial or office vocabulary and skills, the "living" curricula involves a constant dialogue between work language and the language of life as experienced on the shopfloor. "Our teachers tour each workplace where they teach so they can be as involved as possible. The more they are involved in the workplaces, the more they are able to integrate them into their classrooms." (Paula Garcia,12/1/96 interview) Learning about the work universe of their future students is a cultural immersion experience for teachers, who must first be students themselves. Curricula are subject to change as classes move along, reflecting efforts to compare colloquial and official vocabularies and working them into the larger curricular goals of the program. Consider, for example, the following story related by teacher and coordinator, Shobha Sharma about her ESL class at Juno Lighting Inc.:

> There are two kinds of language out there: the industrial language, and what the workers call things. About a year ago, the students were struggling with names of parts. There was something called the Hangar Bar Assembly. But they called it "cuerno" because "cuerno" in Spanish is horn, and they thought it looked like a horn. I got the part and looked

at it. I told them, 'Now I know why you call it "cuerno", but the employer calls it Hangar Bar Assembly and that's what you need to know to communicate to them. The students had their own code for different parts.

Another example was the conduit connector, which has about eight prongs, like a spider. In Spanish it's "araña" which is what they called it. It was weird at first. I asked them "Why do you call it "araña"? We also had another part that looked like a wafer, and the word for wafer in Spanish is "hostia". It was some kind of template. So I was learning their vocabulary and also the industrial vocabulary. There was a culture of communication going on with the workers which the management was unaware of. It was so exciting because the students were helping me understand how naming things comes out of experience and culture.
(Shobha Sharma 12/1/95 video interview)

In language classes a "partnership of meaning" takes place, where naming the world is understood to be a process of cultural experience and cultural exchange.

Learner-Centered Methodology

In practice, the line between the teacher and the learner will repeatedly be obscured. The learner will come to understand the word. The teacher may come to comprehend a broader vision of the world. The learner will...at times become the teacher. A mutuality of learning, then, becomes the quiet if unstated goal.
Jonathan Kozol
Illiterate America,119

The Worker Education Program seeks to understand knowledge as a shared and dynamic process. In this model of knowledge, students — by voicing concerns about their experiences — are creating what Freire has called "generative themes." This student-generated material is incorporated by the teacher so that development of content is a shared activity, created by a community. This differs from a traditional classroom power arrange-

ment which relies on "banking education," where knowledge is vested solely in the teacher who then makes a deposit into the presumably empty vault of the student's mind (Freire, 58). Sharma illustrates the excitement of knowledge as a form of shared activity:

> Not only are you teaching something, you're always learning something from them so that you can improve your teaching techniques. That's what's amazing about this whole process. We keep talking about learner-centered. Here we're living it. It's not a stagnant process of saying "'okay they've learned this, they can stop.'" It's a continuous dynamic, fluidic thing all the time. That's what's so exciting about it for me. I never feel like "Oh, what am I going to do today?" because there's always something exciting.
>
> They can come up with a problem which I can feel like I can help them solve. It's more like a partnership. A good example is that two weeks ago, I had planned for my health and safety class to just talk about aches and pains, and they came up to me and said, "We have pain in the wrist." So this whole thing about carpal tunnel syndrome came up and I had to devise a whole new lesson plan on carpal tunnel syndrome. I knew very little about it, but in the very process of getting ready for it, I learned a lot. And I'm sure the students learned something. It's not just me doling out what I already know; I'm always learning something new. (12/1/95 interview)

Here the teacher and workers have shared power. The teacher has been sensitive to the "thematic universe" of her students. Rather than being heard as disruptive tc the pre-planned curriculum, the student voices have helped to create the lesson. Students and teacher become co-owners of the learning process.

For many teachers, the uniqueness of this idea a refreshing departure from more traditional methods.

> The program is centered around what the students want instead of coming in with a prescribed agenda. It gives students a sense of empowerment. I've never seen a pro-

> gram that tried so honestly to meet the needs of workers. (Jay Schearer, quoted in Julie Johnson, 19)

The use of "generative themes" constitutes one of many pieces of the learner-centered philosophy as practiced in the Worker Education Program. Bringing concrete objects that are used on the job is another way that experience comes into the classroom.

> I remember at one particular plant taking students out on the floor so they could run through the different parts they use on the job. Then we took those things off the floor and brought them into the classroom and used them for all kinds of activities. For example, we used role plays incorporating machine parts into language exercises. (Sabrina Budasi-Martin, 12/1/95 video interview)

Teachers use a variety of exercises and activities reflecting the "participatory approach" to learning and have developed an eclectic teaching methodology which permits them to address visual, aural, and kinesthetic learning styles. This approach draws on several state-of-the-art theories of teaching English as a Second Language and adult education: Problem-posing techniques (Freire, Auerbach & Wallerstein); the Language Experience Approach (Nessel, Dixon) which emphasizes the use of student-dictated stories; student-generated dialogues and roleplays in which workplace situations are acted out to bridge the gap between classrooms and real life situations; Total Physical Response, (Asher) used successfully with tactile learners; and cooperative learning and pairwork based on the premise that while we learn only 20% of what we hear, we learn 95% of what we teach to others (Glasser). Such methodologies maximize student team-building and interpersonal communications skills. These methodologies are used in conjunction with a variety of activities such as dialogue journals, word BINGO, "telephone," one-minute monologues and debates.

Professional Development

The professional development component of the Worker

Education Program is an ongoing process of problem-solving about the day to day issues which occur in the classrooms in the workplaces. For example, a central problem for WEP teachers is to create and maintain learner-centered practices. (See the *Learner-Centered Methodologies* section above). Such practices form the core of the program's teaching philosophy, but implementing them often involves the challenge of overcoming years of more authoritarian-based schooling for both teachers and workers. Transitioning to a more learner-centered model is often uncomfortable because it involves developing new attitudes about knowledge as occuring through collaboration between teachers and students. Students often expect teachers to be the sole source of knowledge and are unfamiliar with more participatory forms of classroom experiences. As program evaluators Katherine Larson and Joseph Fischer point out:

> The WEP faces the challenge of implementing a worker-centered approach to instruction for adult learners who are frequently in a formal educational setting for the first time, or for the first time in a very long time. They are most often products of teacher-centered, rote-based educational systems. It is not uncommon for students from such backgrounds to expect a teacher-centered classroom in which students do not take initiative. (Fischer and Larson, 8)

Just as students must learn to reconceptualize themselves as learners, so must teachers reconsider the instructional process. In order to develop strategies for creating more participatory and responsive classroom environments, professional development has become an essential component of the Worker Education Program. Through monthly meetings of the teaching staff, coordinators provide opportunities for professional support. Teachers work cooperatively in these meetings to develop mini-lessons, discuss instructional materials and to give and receive support from coordinators as well as other teachers. In addition, teachers meet regularly one-on-one with program coordinators to work out specific issues and problems arising in the classroom. Coordinators observe classes and offer positive feedback in order to help teachers improve classroom atmosphere and lesson plans, to institute a variety of learning activities, and to increase student participation. In these mentoring sessions, coordinators and teachers work collaboratively to insure the highest quality of teaching. The program also provides financial support and encouragement for teachers to attend and make presentations at professional development conferences. Teachers share new insights which emerge from these conferences with other teachers, thus providing an ongoing means for remaining current about teaching methodologies, learning theory and practical issues in workplace education. Partnerships are also actively fostered in the development of the program as a whole. Such partnering provides a model of sharing which can be duplicated in the classroom. As learners in a participatory classroom help create the curriculum, so too are teachers not only "shaped" by the program, they help create it. Larson and Fischer concluded:

> The working relationship among the...staff is harmonious and based on regular communication, feedback and hands on knowledge of the program operation at each workplace....Many administrative decisions that impact the

teaching staff or worker participants are made with the input of teachers and workers, reflecting the program's 'participatory' approach. Attendance forms and student assessment instruments for example, were modified as a result of input from teachers. Teachers were also instrumental in restructuring courses into 16-week modules, thus helping to systematize curriculum implementation and assessment periods. (Fischer and Larson, 6)

In this way, teacher-administrator relations are formed in the context of a community.

We don't want teachers to feel like they're in a vacuum; that they're out there all by themselves...We call teachers to see how things are going and assist them with any kind of training or curriculum development they need. Teachers have the freedom to write their own competencies and objectives that go with the workplace where they are teaching. We help them out, review what they've done and observe their classes. In turn, they do their own progress reports and this gives them an opportunity for reflective and ongoing feedback. It's a very reflective process which teachers and administrators can learn from. (Sabrina Budasi-Martin, program coordinator, 12/1/95 video interview)

This collaborative and reflective professional development philosophy helps teachers identify themselves as co-owners of the program. Teachers often express the sentiment of being community stakeholders in a project which will have far-reaching effects. One teacher stated:

The program staff is open to new ideas and suggestions. They are always there when we need advice about something. Through workshops and sharing sessions the teachers have learned more about workplace teaching methods. We have devised more appropriate ways of assessing students. We have worked hard together to develop new materials which may benefit future workplace programs." (Susan Womack, quoted in Boyter-Escalona, *Enhancing Workers' Skill*, 15)

Conclusions

The partnership philosophy underlies the purpose and functioning of advisory boards, recruitment activities, curriculum development, teaching methodologies, and professional development in the Worker Education Program. In all of these practices, participants in the program have learned over time that such partnering requires time, commitment, and investment by all parties on all levels. Where program activities have been successful, all four entities—teachers, students, union and employers—have been true stakeholders in the program. The lesson of these practices for other educational programs is that these foundations of shared authority must be cultivated to sustain a sense of community ownership.

OUTCOMES

The outcomes of the Worker Education Program are seen in both the hard evidence of researchers and in the stories that participants tell. WEP has measured outcomes of basic skills classes, using pre and post-tests, and outside evaluators have agreed those tests show positive and statistically significant results. Testimony also shows positive change has occurred and that participants share an optimistic faith that the program will continue to help both employers and workers. In this section, quantitative and qualitative evidence are entwined to demonstrate this positive impact of the Worker Education Program. While the program is relatively young, and time will tell more about long-term success, it is hard to miss positive signs of achievement.

The following outcomes are briefly discussed in this section: **improvement of basic skills**; the **achievement of promotions**; and **the impact on team building and production.**

Improvement of Basic Skills: Communication and Math

The importance of ongoing education in basic math and communications is essential to the new American workplace, particularly as employers strive to compete in a tougher global marketplace. It is difficult to measure improvement in workplace communication, but its importance is undeniable. The ability of workers to communicate well with each other and with supervisors is integral to the development of confidence, self-esteem and team building. These qualities are in the best interests of manufacturers, particularly in light of national trends (which are reflected in goals of WEP participating employers) to develop team decision-making on the shop floors of American employers. Similarly, ongoing changes in technology in the more competitive workplace require workers to have a functional knowledge of math in order to adjust to new equipment.

Learning these skills is especially critical in view of the demographic profile of our participants. The majority of

workers in the plants who participated in the WEP classes from 1993 to 1995 were foreign-born and their first language was not English. They represent 30 different nationalities and have completed an average of 7 years of formal schooling.

How can we best assess the success of the program? Numbers are one way. Quantitative measures of communication and math skills of these participants show improvement according to outside evaluators Fischer and Larson. Their gains in communication skills as a result of English as a Second Language classes were measured using three tests: the BEST Oral Subtest, the BEST Literacy Subtest, and the Holistic Writing Sample.

In more human terms, these results show a new world of English literacy slowly opening up for WEP participants. Many ESL students in the workforce have little or no English language ability when they begin literacy classes. In practical terms, this means they live in a world where English words on a piece of paper, directions from a supervisor, or communication from the union are meaningless. Learning a new language as adults takes time and long-term commitment. Those who have committed themselves make improvements by first being able to ask and respond to simple questions, and to recognize and write simple words. As they continue, they become more self-confident about speaking English with supervisors and other English speakers at the workplace. It is difficult for adults to learn a new language, especially when they live in environments where their native languages are spoken almost exclusively. The greatest improvement for WEP participants occurs among workers who are in workplaces where coworkers encourage and practice English with them.

Student writings from English as a Second Language classes help to interpret the quantitative measurements in experiential terms. Writing, short simple phrases is a sign of a growing levels of English competency. In these excerpts, ESL students speak for themselves.

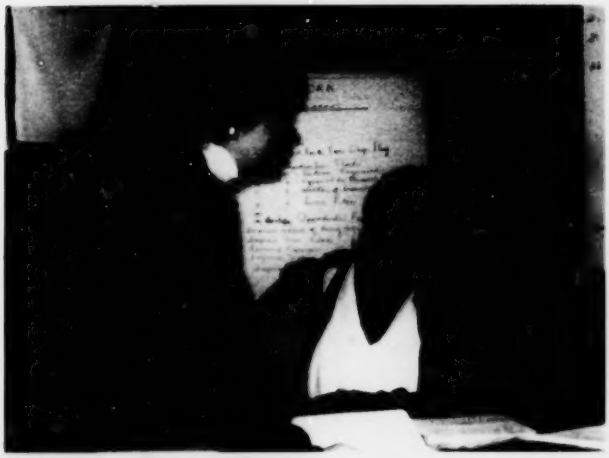
I used to nod 'yes' even when I didn't understand my boss. Now I can tell him, "Yes, I understand" and "No, I don't understand."

I have lived and worked in the United States a long time, but I don't know how to read. I was afraid of letters and signs. I didn't have any way to understand them. Now in this class I am learning letters and how words are written and I'm not afraid of them anymore. The teachers help me overcome my fear. I didn't believe I could learn something. I'm very happy.

...when I started to work in this employer, I didn't need very much English, but now I have to communicate with more people in English. For example: we have a meeting every day and I have to explain the problems at work. My supervisor only speaks to us in English. For that reason, I appreciate this class. (Fischer and Larson, 28-32)

The union representative from Louisville, Kentucky who represents workers at the Enro Shirt Company reports that ESL classes there have helped an otherwise isolated group of Vietnamese workers feel like greater stakeholders both in the union and in the company.

The program gave a chance for a large segment of the workforce here (about 10-15%) to feel a part of something. They were on the "outside" because their group didn't speak English so when they got involved in the education steering



committee, they were active where they hadn't been before. We brought public attention to their achievements after the first set of classes had ended with balloons and rewards. (Buonadonna interview)

Another supervisor from Enro commented, "[The program] has made a big difference. Before mistakes were often hidden and passed on, but now workers are more willing to talk directly and we don't have to pay an interpreter when problems arise." (Fischer and Larson, 35)

On the whole, the quantitative and anecdotal evidence suggest that an increase in basic skill levels helps in at least three ways: workers perform their jobs better, workers have an opportunity to feel more like stakeholders in their workplaces, and employer managers are able to solve production problems easier.

Achievement of Promotions

The philosophy of the WEP program is based on the premise that an achievement for one stakeholder represents a gain for all. In terms of promotions, employers are able to improve the "human" capital on the shopfloor in order to promote from within, and workers are given an opportunity to rise to higher levels of responsibility in the company. Not all participating employers provided information about internal promo-

tions, but of the six who did, all reported promoting WEP students.

The following account of the impact of the WEP on a participating employer is excerpted from the Fischer and Larson evaluation report on the program:

A plastics manufacturer is moving toward a teamwork-based orientation, with Total Quality Management guiding company operations. The human resources manager noted that the trend in the industry is to grow leadership from within the company, with significant resources committed to enhancing the skills and contributions of the existing workforce. He described the situation this way:

> If we bring in a stranger, we don't know if he or she will be good for us, whether they will be a team worker. Our goal is to have TQM in operation all the way to the line worker. Training and education are important to help with more than stuffing boxes on the line. Workers must be able to help solve problems. (interview with human resources manager)

WEP has enabled the company to promote from within. All of the employees who serve as trainers for new assembly line workers have attended or are currently attending ESL classes and have been promoted as a result of ESL classes. Others have been promoted and need to attend ESL classes in order to be fully functional. (Fischer and Larson, 34)

WEP has been instrumental in providing not only the skills necessary to achieve promotions, but in helping workers gain the confidence to apply for higher positions. It also demonstrates the potential of workplace classes to break down traditional gender barriers and to foster self-esteem and success among participants.

At Juno Lighting, Inc. a student in the Maintenance Preparation course was promoted from line worker to a Class C Maintenance position, involving new job responsibilities and skills and a raise in pay. The Maintenance course was designed specifically to help workers qualify for positions in the Maintenance department and although

this worker was pessimistic about her chances of gaining such a position, particularly because she was a woman, she studied hard and completed the 16 week course successfully. When asked how she feels about her new job she replied, "I feel better because now I know more about a new job and I have more confidence that I will excel in life. When I go out and fix something and then go back and write it down, I feel good because I accomplished something new...Even if I lost this job, I can fix machines now and do this same kind of work anywhere. (Sabrina Budasi-Martin interview)

Union-Management Team Building

The movement on the part of American employers to work towards greater team based decision-making on the shopfloor requires a shift in attitudes about how work is carried out. While there exists no quantitative evidence of improved attitudes about working more cooperatively in teams, participants in the Worker Education Program — from workers, to employers to unions — suggest that the program plays a role in nurturing such team building attitudes. The program has helped both participating employers and the union reach their separate institutional goals.

There is reason to speculate that programs such as WEP can foster collaborative attitudes in workplaces where labor relations were previously characterized more by confrontation. There is anecdotal evidence that workers sometimes reconstruct their views of the management after participating in a WEP class. Mistrust and misunderstanding can transform to trust and good will as illustrated in the following comments by worker participants taken from students' evaluations. Students represented here are workers both in offices and manufacturing plants and have attended classes as varied as customer service, business writing, ESL and workplace orientation.

The Worker Education Program was a...good and growing experience that...also made for...more good will within the bank itself.

Amalgamated Bank of Chicago employee
Chicago, Illinois

I honestly believe that this course enhances the chance of workers being more loyal to their employer. If we understand how it operates, how it relates to us and our way of life and also how hard it is to compete in our business, we may be more lenient toward the employer.

Joseph and Feiss employee
Cleveland, Ohio

I really feel honored to be part of these classes. I feel like ABOC cares about me...by offering these classes.

Amalgamated Bank of Chicago employee
Chicago, Illinois

The classes are very good...I appreciate my bosses at the factory for caring that we learn English.

Thanks for caring about us.

Manufacturing worker
Chicago metropolitan area, Illinois

Robert Worshill is a seasoned union president of a UNITE local which is comprised of workers at the Amalgamated Bank of Chicago. His assessment of the impact of the program suggests that class offerings can open

up new channels of communication between workers and managers which result in new ideas for employer practices. The Worker Education Program is the first ongoing education effort at the bank for at least Worshill's 21 years. WEP has offered classes in customer service, bank products and services, business writing and English as a Second Language.

> Once we got the classes rolling, [the workers] started to open up candidly and honestly in their classes. The instructors took down their suggestions which were then submitted to management and many of the suggestions were implemented. For example one suggestion was that we implement voice mail. The management people were very responsive, and in a very short time we had a voice mail system.
>
> Another good thing that came of it was our classes were made open to supervisory personnel too because it wasn't restricted just to union employees, which was good. The classes helped eliminate the "us and them" mentality and this was good for labor-management relations because we all felt it was more like a partnership. (Robert Worshill, 1/5/96 telephone interview)

The promise of the program to strengthen collaboration between unions and employers is echoed in the words of UNITE business agent Joe Buonadonna.

> [After the first set of classes at Emro] there was a positive newspaper article in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* and that was a source of pride for everybody. The employer had it framed and put it in the manager's office. The whole experience gave the employer one more reason to trust us.
>
> Part of our success is that the employer was receptive about the program from the beginning. They wanted to change their workforce to more of a team environment than an individual piece rate environment, and they felt they needed to train workers in new skills, and this has been a way to get started. (Buonadonna, telephone interview)

Libby Saries, Education Director for UNITE's Chicago and Central States Joint Board, initiated the Worker Education Program. She believes the partnership model between the union and participating companies is essential to building team-based attitudes, as they strive together to make workplaces more competitive.

> Many of the employers involved as partners in our project trained their managers and supervisors in Total Quality Management only to hit a brick wall on the shop floor. In some cases less than 10% of the workers spoke English. It is nearly impossible to have working teams or planning groups if the members cannot communicate with each other. Even with the native speakers of English in these workplaces there is often a shortage of the basic skills necessary to participate in the process. The question is how to approach this training? Many approaches have not been successful. Top down training has nearly always failed. The workers being trained must have a role in the planning from the beginning. Partnerships based on mutual recognition and respect are essential to a successful program. Without this partnership, training is about as successful as a two-legged stool. It just does't work. Partnership between the union and the employer is essential. This is a model that will be effective in training workers for the future.
>
> While both the companies and the union have vested interests in the economic health of manufacturing, the effect of the Worker Education Program on production — while often difficult to measure — is a particularly attractive incentive for companies. The following illustration shows how, over time, positive changes in production rates are within reach. (Libby Saries, 1/4/96 telephone interview)

For eight years, Conrad Medina has been plant manager at Juno Lighting Inc. Ultimately he has observed not only better communications but better production rates as well.

> During my second year [as plant manager] I really believed in education and I tried to encourage workers to attend

> nearby schools and other programs. I got information about these programs and distributed them, but nothing much happened. So when the union brought this education program up, I jumped at it. Now it has been here for three years and it has worked very nicely. It really has helped. The classes [in ESL, basic skills, team-building and problem solving] for workers has helped them communicate better but also their efficiency has increased. Three years ago when the classes first started our production for each department was an *average* of 80%. That means the percentage compared to full capacity. Now look at it. [He pulls out a report from his top drawer] Figures show *starting* from 84% all the way to 120%. This is what's occurred over the 3 year period since the program started. (Conrad Medina, 12/21/95 interview)

Classes at Juno have always been popular, even though workers attended on their own time. "I am not a believer in big self rewards. I am a believer in self-motivation," Medina said. He had always believed in the importance of education but before WEP, its impact on production was untested. After three years of the Worker Education Program, the plant has now decided to pay 50% time for class attendance. Medina explains, "I now want to enhance motivation." (Medina interview)

Conclusion

Whether one examines quantitative or anecdotal evidence, the Worker Education Program has had a positive impact and shows promise for continued success. Workers show significant improvement in basic skills after attending workplace based classes. The many levels of the Worker Education Program's partnering activities have improved the climate of trust and team-building in many of the work settings. This has helped to increase productivity by encouraging promotions from within, and by helping workers

to achieve better work skills and a more optimistic attitude about the importance of their work to the whole enterprise.

While the long-term impact of the Worker Education Program can be better evaluated over time, preliminary evidence supports the conclusion that the program has achieved impressive results.

BEYOND SCHOOLS AND TIMECLOCKS

Implications of the Worker Education Program for Work and School

The word "progress" in the title of this monograph means *continuing, not stopping; an assumption of ongoingness.* One of the strengths of WEP is a continuing process of self-reflection. Such reflections — by advisory committees, teachers, students, and administrators — result in a continuous creating and recreating of the program. Through this reflective process, the program provides an educational model which responds to the changing and complex nature of the workplace. This is a useful lesson for all educational institutions—from elementary to university levels; and from adult education in the workplace to adult learning for community and school leadership development — as we strive to build flexible, adaptive programs in a fast changing world.

Public debate over the last two decades has spun around the need for changes in the schoolhouse and changes in the workplace. The two are like twins, riding on the same rhetorical wind. Indeed, the history of American education and work demonstrates a solid link between the two. For example, as we made a turn into the 20th century following the industrial revolution, educators looked to industry for models of teaching and school administration. The "scientific management" theories of industrial engineer Frederick Taylor were applied to the problems of mass schooling, as urban areas swelled with immigrants, industrial workers, and masses of children squeezed into small spaces. The implementation of decision-making through pyramid-type hierarchies in both work and school was the response to mass chaos and the challenges of city life. Top-down hierarchies in both school and work helped to institute the discipline to produce both academically and industrially. Such organizational models were useful for early industrialization and for implementing a large-scale public school system.

Eventually though, this organizational model for both industry and education began to outlive its usefulness.

Experts had engineered assembly lines as well as the education process in the graded schools. Schooling, like industry, was vested in the hands of "experts" with newly specialized forms of knowledge. While this helped to make industry more productive and education more a professional enterprise, it also meant that schools often became isolated from the community involvement they had enjoyed in the more rural, early 19th century. (Callahan, 1962) In addition, the movement to professionalize teaching by requiring increased levels of education was a contradiction to the top-down school organization model, leaving teachers feeling like hired hands. In the late 20th century the country has begun to be swept up in the revelation that more team-based management, as evidenced by the Japanese model, brought about more efficient manufacturing. Similarly, movements are afoot to bring back more local control of schools which means that teachers and parents are begining to share responsibility for school management with administrators.

As we approach the 21st century, Americans are actively pursuing change in decision-making models both in schools and workplaces. While debate may often be acrimonious, there is a growing recognition of the need for greater collaboration among people and institutions. Collaboration is becoming a cultural value, bringing more

stakeholders and greater resources into decision-making. Changes are already apparent in how we teach, how we work and how we make decisions. An interest in collaboration is seen in both nascent and mature experiments in site-based management in schools; in a movement from confrontation to collaboration in labor relations, and team-based models of decision-making on the shopfloor. (David, Brandt, Penbera, Batt, Fisher and Ury)

Such changes call for reeducation in all of these arenas of decision-making. In some workplaces, workers are being trained in basic skills and also problem-solving methods to prepare for team-based work cultures. Eileen Applebaum and Rosemary Batt have argued in a recent study, *The New American Workplace* that the training of the front-line work force, as opposed to training exclusively management level employees, is necessary to the "team model" which calls for reengineering through the development of all human resources. The Worker Education Program is making solid contributions to these efforts.

The program also has effects beyond the workplace. Because it is based on and teaches collaborative decision-making, working parents who have participated in the program, often become more involved in school-based decision making. It is perhaps too bold a task to attempt to articulate an explicit system which links work-based adult education to adult learning for local school improvement. However, at the very least, the parallels between the two are striking and may provide useful points for linking workplace learning models to models of parent education in local schools. As experiments with more democratized decision-making occur on the local school level the relationship between parents and their public school children is getting more attention. Jonathan Kozol in his book *Illiterate America* took note of the importance of this relationship when he wrote a decade ago that:

> The parents who cannot read to their own children in the years before they enter school are also those...who find it hardest to assess the teachers or to scrutinize the textbooks which their children are assigned in public school. The fear that holds them at a distance from the act of reading also holds them at a distance from the school itself.
>
> Many parents who are not good readers can intuitively sense a hopeless situation in their child's school. Those, however, who do not possess the competence to read and write, to analyze, to research and to draw the right conclusions from the research, cannot turn their intuitions into criticisms that the schools will hear. They can raise their voices, but too often what they choose to criticize will be the least important part of a substantial problem which they have no way to target for attention. (Kozol, 7)

More than twenty states have passed legislation to create schools where teachers, parents, the principal, staff and community members are to be responsible, in one degree or another, for making school-based decisions. These include such relatively new decision-making bodies as the Local School Councils in Chicago. Researchers estimate that by 1990, one-third of all public school districts moved to some version of site-based management, and that five states per year, since that time have "jumped on the bandwagon." (David, 5) Since site-based management typically tries to involve more parents in local decision-making, clearly a better educated group of parents will help such experiments in local democracy to be successful. Researcher Jane David acknowledges that site-based models were instituted so that all stakeholders in public education would be involved in its practice and outcomes, thus theoretically improving schools as a whole. But, she argues, while its advocates are well-meaning, there is still much work ahead. "Schools are unlikely to improve unless community members—and particularly parents—participate meaningfully." (David, 6).

David places a particular emphasis on the need for adult learning:

> First, council members need new skills, assistance and practice in asking hard questions and gathering evidence about what is and is not working. Second, councils need to appreciate that their constituencies — parents and educators — require access to new knowledge and skills, both to be active decision-makers and to change their teaching and learning practices and beliefs. (David, 7)

Researchers agree that to shift the locus of power to the community involves nothing less than deep cultural change. (David, Guskey and Peterson) Parents, teachers, community members and principals are conditioned to top-down modes of authority, and must change significantly if more effective forms of democratic control are to be achieved. Creating situations for adult learning seems essential to reconstructing our cultural view of power.

The key is long-term commitment. Such changes will occur slowly over time and require an experimental spirit and imaginative solutions. The Worker Education Program, through its unique form of community outreach, has the potential to make a significant impact on this long-term process in at least three ways.

By making basic skills and language training available

at workplaces, parents are motivated to go to classes for self-improvement. Such classes often result in concrete rewards such as promotions; and often employers provide half-pay for class time as an additional incentive. Such self-improvement results in higher self-esteem which, in turn, affects family life. The WEP is therefore in a unique position to foster a partnership between workplace learning and family learning. Many of the workers in the Worker Education Program are immigrants who are concerned about their children's' education. They value the workplace education program, in part, because it gives them the confidence to take a pro-active role in their children's' education. Consider the following selections from *Working Hands and Active Minds: The Voices of Workers, An Anthology of Participant Writings From the Worker Education Program.*

> Last year my daughter told me, 'Mommy could you help me with my homework. I told her, 'I can't because I don't know decimals.' Last six months she asked me the same question and I helped her because I know decimals now.
>
> Fidelina Alvarez
> Juno Lighting, Inc.

> I always had problem with mathematics, that's why I took this class because I think if someone else can do it, I think I like to continue. I feel some change because now I can help my kids with their math or algebra.
>
> Gerardo Contreras
> Phoenix Closures

> I'm married. I have one daughter. I have been working at my company for seven years. I like to practice English because I need to write and read more to help my daughter. Also because I like to speak English...
>
> Rita Olivas
> A Chicago metropolitan area manufacturer

While it is clear from the record that such workers are improving productivity for their employers, and are being rewarded for improving their skills, they have serious

concerns about how they can have an impact on their children's achievement in school.

Another way the Worker Education Program can help change decision-making culture is through its participatory methodology. The ESL, GED, math, problem-solving and teambuilding and other classes promote a team concept of learning, where workers learn that authority is shared between teachers and students, while keeping an eye on specific learning goals. Thomas Guskey and Kent Peterson argue that a problem with site-based management in schools is that partners — including parents — who are being asked to contribute equally to the decision-making process are restrained by "cognitive maps." The boundaries of authority in these "maps" must be redrawn before participants experience themselves as collaborative decision-makers. Since the WEP teaching methodology promotes the workers' "voice" and encourages a sharing of authority, such programs can give parents practice in redrawing those maps. (Guskey, Peterson, 12)

Thirdly, as site-based school management is a collaborative model, so too is the Worker Education Program. Because administration of the program is premised on partnership where authority is shared among educational providers, union and employers, it can provide information to school councils on what works and what doesn't work, contributing to the literature on collaborative decision-making. Such practices as recruitment, program development and evaluation, the function of advisory boards, and the use of student writings and stories as learning activities and motivational devices are beneficial areas of study for local schools.

Lessons of the Worker Education Program are useful not only to other Worker Education Programs, but to schools wishing to involve more parents, to create adult learning environments; and to promote partnerships both in work and school cultures.

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From its beginning, our union has been involved in efforts to teach the English language and the culture of work in America to our members. Education has been a priority not only for our members but for their families. The employers have trained the workers to do the tasks for which they were hired. But the kind of workplace education required today is beyond the scope of one union or one employer.

Libby Saries
Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees
Testimony on the Reauthorization of the Adult Education Act

It's absolutely true that we are all interconnected. In a society the welfare of one affects all. This isn't just an interpretation of chaos theory, it is just basic economics. When one of us loses a job, he stops producing for the time being, but society still has the same number of mouths to feed. Modern science, including the science of chaos, has shown us that we are much more interrelated than we ever imagined.

Rafael Aguayo
Dr. Deming: The American Who Taught the Japanese About Quality

My name is Norma Contreras. I study English now. It has helped me in my work and to make appointments with the doctor, when I go to the store, and when I speak with the teacher of my daughter.

Norma Contreras
Working Hands and Active Minds: The Voices of Workers, Anthology of Participant Writings from the Worker Education Program

It's important for the workers to be equal participants because they are the ones that really know what goes on at the bottom line...they are the ones that can give us solutions to our problems.

Bob Staes
Safety Manager, Juno Lighting Co.

Although the program's focus is on work competencies, the philosophy of the program is to teach global skills. When one learns to read the dial on a machine, one transfers these skills to take a thermometer reading or weigh fruit in a grocery store. The program's interactive and holistic methodology has enhanced workers' self-esteem, on-the-job performance, position in their labor union, role in the community, and in the eyes of their most precious resources-their children.

Margaret Boyter-Escalona
Director, Worker Education Program/NEIU

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